I have been a grandmother for seven months. This grandchild has several grandparents, at least four grandmothers and three grandfathers. If I marry again, the number goes up to four grandpas. She also has a great grandmother, my mother. Our mutual granddaughter is fortunate. She has grandparents with such diverse backgrounds and careers, that they could be a Global Interfaith Counsel.

It was so simple growing up. Two sets of grandparents who we visited regularly, sometimes both sets on the same Sunday. For Passover, we went the first night to dad’s parents’ house for the Seder. I remember how fast Grandpa (Louis) Linden chanted the service in Hebrew, while everyone talked and grandma was in the kitchen cooking, yelling back and forth. It was very festive. Afterwards, Grandma (Lena) Linden would sneak candy to us after my mom had strongly told her not to
do that. She closed both eyes a couple of times in a
mischievous wink. This happened regularly. My mother says she
made good gefilte fish and chicken soup and other things.

Grandma put her phone in the closet. We told her she
wouldn’t be able to hear the phone ring if she did that. That
was fine with her. She was a real character. She made us laugh.

Reflecting now, she seemed to have a great deal of joy
even though she came from worlds of family tragedy. She was
the youngest of thirteen children and the only girl. All her
brothers were killed in the Holocaust. She came from an
educated family and pushed her three sons into the best
educations and careers. The youngest was a teacher, then a
very successful real estate broker. The middle son was a
merchant who went back to school to become a lawyer and
then became an uncontested judge for many years. My dad
was a successful CPA, senior partner in the largest local,
primarily Jewish, accounting firm in Detroit. My Grandma Lena
married Louis, who was a tailor. He was a sweet, simple man. She was the driving force behind her boys’ aspirations and success.

And then there were mom’s parents: George and Dora. Grandma Trute was so loved by all. She was the one who seemed most selfless and accepting of all of her grandchildren, who were all so very different. And she also was an incredible cook. (I am told that my father would fill up on her food first before he went to his mother’s house to eat.) What I remember most was Grandma Trute’s strudel. She would take all day to bake her strudel with the thinnest, crispiest layers of crust I have ever tasted. My sister tried to write the recipe one time, while she was preparing her strudel. Jill said it didn’t work because grandma added a bit of this and a bit of that and it wasn’t possible to make sense out of her process. When these grandparents moved closer to us and to our school, I sometimes came to her house for lunch. That was very special.
My mom spoke about how important education was to grandma and how she supported her children in their journey to go to college in a time when that was not the norm, especially for women. Mom didn’t have to do her job of washing the floors (where? For others?) when she went to college, one of her younger siblings took on. Grandpa Trute had been a blacksmith in the old country. When he came here, he did the same work. When there were no more horses to shoe, he made ornamental metal fences. My new grandchild Xavi’s father is also a metal sculptor who has also created ornamental metal fences, Grandpa Trute’s last job, worked for the automobile industry when we lived in Detroit. It was fun to get him to smile. He often seemed sad, but he was always nice to his grandchildren. But again, it was Grandma Trute who encouraged education.

I had an extraordinary experience when she died. My husband and I were meditating all day with our meditation
students. I remember the small room at The Boston Center for the Arts, where my theater company was housed. We had been meditating with different students, offering them practices and guidance for several hours when my friend, another Sufi Meditation teacher, came in the room between students. She told me that my family had called to tell me that my Grandma Trute had passed on. I was in a very high state at the time. I closed my eyes and saw her spirit soaring joyously from her paralyzed body that had burdened her for so long. I felt an ecstatic sense of her freedom now. I knew that she was offering me a gift of her inspiring, loving, devoted example and hoped that I could carry on for her in that regard. The experience of that moment has stayed with me all these years.

I can only pray that the spirit of my grandmothers can inspire me with their grace, humor and unconditional love with this new grandchild and others who may grace this earth in the future.
All of Xavi’s grandparents have been encouraged to take on different names so Xavi can distinguish us better. We have Opa and Oma; Grandfleur and Grandgee, Grammie Grahm; and I vasculate between Grandma Saphira (how ordinary!) and Bubbe. My son encourages Bubbe; my daughter-in-law says it’s up to me. My mother, her only great grandmother, is Gee Gee.

It is now 21 months into grandparenthood. Xavi is an extraordinary soul. I am not objective. Besides being the most charming, beautiful, graceful little soul on the planet, she is a strong, creative, initiator and easily makes her desires and feelings known. She is so fun to be with. She helps me re-connect to my own inner child, who loves to play. My own work in Drama Therapy is based on play. She is one of my best teachers, [now, when I’m at a low because of having lost—as so many others have also—a huge amount of my life savings in the Madoff investment scandal].

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Her parents are both so attentive and conscious with her on all levels, from food to potty training, from creative activities to letting her needs dictate the family rhythm. Her mother is still nursing and both of them seem to love it. Xavi’s words are developing by the day, but even without them, it is usually clear what she wants.

Xavi had a home water birth. She came into the world in a rented blown up pool. The grandma who lived in the area, who had been a midwife, was present. I have to admit I was jealous. She assisted the attending midwife. Even though it had been a long time since she’d been a practicing midwife, I was pleased that she was there, but it was hard to be across the country.

When Xavi was six months old, I offered to take her and her mom to a dance concert, when my son was busy. My daughter-in-law remembered that at the Berklee Arts Center there is an unused lighting booth where they allow babies and
moms and grandmas to watch a concert, giving them freedom to yell or cry, without disturbing the audience. We watched an extraordinary dance company from Moscow and Xavi was held up against the window, which provided a pretty good view. Sound was piped in through speakers. The dances were varied with very bright colored costumes, incredible energy and vibrance. Our little one began to move to the music in rhythm as she was watching, with intensity and amazing focus. Her mom and I looked at each other in amazement. Sooo, do we have a Martha Graham on our hands or perhaps a Margot Fonteyn? I guess every grandma thinks like that.

Xavi does seem to be a budding artist, dancer, musician and actor. Why shouldn’t she be? Painting, sculpture, acting, playwriting, directing, dancing, song writing, singing, guitar playing, creative writing and even performance whistling are in the experience of her grandparents. Xavi’s mom is gifted in a variety of art forms; her dad is a metal sculptor and has been a
painter. Together, they have remodeled their apartments. He has built furniture, kitchen counters, fences and much more; my daughter in law has been active in interior design, made curtains, a bed cornester, refurbished a chandelier and much more.

I have been in theater all my life. From a very early age, I was reciting stories to my imaginary audience, standing on my bed. I seemed to come in with a natural flare for the dramatic. My family thought they were funny when they called me Sarah ‘Heartburn.’ That said, I was supported in my budding talent. By the age of 8, I had taken ballet lessons, piano lessons and drama lessons. I am grateful for my mother’s love of the arts. (She was a singer). I appreciated how she shlepped all four of her kids to lessons, scouts, and other activities through our upbringing.

Three of Xavi’s grandparents lost most of their life savings in the Madoff Fraud. I call losing all my life savings in the
Madoff collapse my “Madoff initiation.” But it is Xavi, who I connect to on Skype from Boston and in San Francisco in person, who brings me hope for the future. She was a year and a half when Madoff was arrested, to the day. This child represents a new generation, after the current major shift in consciousness that we are all a part of. We are moving from death of the old systems to rebirth of the new. When I watch her in playgroups with other children of many different ethnic and racial backgrounds, she helps me remember one of our Sufi ideals that envisions the whole of humanity as one single family in the parenthood of God. When I am with her, I experience this bright soul as pure love itself and I feel deep gratitude to have her as a grandchild.

All of Xavi’s grandparents have showered her with gifts of different kinds. For me, my favorite gifts were supporting her mom’s wish to take Xavi to music lessons and most recently to music/dance class. This has been a great joy. The music
lessons I paid for in full. After Madoff, I could only contribute to
the payment of the music/dance class. That made me sad,
maybe more so than a lot of other losses.

Try as her parents and grandparents have to not be sexist
or encourage stereotypical female clothing, toys, or activities,
this little girl has always gravitated to jewelry, beautiful shoes,
and likes to pick out her own clothes—before the age of 2!

True, she has her own style, like the other day, she chose a
crinoline slip that was picked up at a 2nd hand store, which she
put on by herself, keeping the rest of her body nude. Recently,
when I skyped, she was sitting on her papa’s lap nude with
something around her neck. Her papa moved the computer
closer and she showed me: “Necklis,” she said, eyeing and
fingering her newest treasure.

When I was last with her, we read a book together on
colors. Blue seemed to be her favorite. “What color is your
necklace?” I asked. “Bluuue,” she answered. Yes, one of the
favorite colors of our Linden family. At one point, all six of us, my parents and four grown children siblings, living in different places, discovered that we all had blue cars. On Xavi’s greatgrandmother’s 90th birthday, everyone was invited to wear blue and the restaurant and cake were decorated in blue, her favorite color. Xavi was 3 months old. Perhaps she was impressed by osmosis.

[Ah, technology! Mostly technology creates more work for me. Now, I not only have 3 phones, home, business and cell, but 2 computers, a desktop and laptop that have to be continually updated to be able to talk to each other. It’s like two people of different backgrounds in conflict, learning each other’s language. I had an early computer since Xavi’s paternal grandfather is a cracker jack computer scientist. He once told me he could make a computer dance. He and his current wife began to do Video Skype so that they could communicate with Xavi; my son suggested I do it as well.]

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At last, though not with perfect sound, there she was!

How wonderful to see her wave and talk to me in her gibberish language.

I am a #2 on the Enneagram, a system of soul and personality types. I love to give meaningful little gifts to people. Over the years, I have come to see that the enjoyment I receive from finding things and offering them can be as much or more for me than for the recipient. It’s a fun pursuit. I shop all year long for the next Chanucha and Christmas. Chanucha is eight days so I get to give eight gifts, one for each night. My children, their partners, nephews, nieces, other step children and their kids have all gotten gifts like this. I have a storage closet which is all gifts. The 2nd closet designated for luggage and holiday periphanelia now holds the overflow. The gifts in my closet(s) are often bought with someone in mind. Once Xavi was born, well...You can imagine how delightful it was to buy things for this precious little girl. After raising two sons,
how fun this is. How lucky it is that I had all of these things already. Since the Madoff disaster, I have been able to find things for her in my own closet, without spending a cent.

My heart is no more mine. It is thine own, my spiritual guide.  

Hazrat Inayat Khan

I believe Xavi has come in to help heal the heart wounds of our complex family system. For me and perhaps others, she has become a kind of spiritual guide.

We grandparents have a wide range of religious backgrounds. Two of us were brought up Jewish, one Reform and one Conservative that for me evolved into Jewish Mysticism. Two of us were born Catholic, one became Episcopal, then interested in Buddhism, then discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls and got into Judaism, teaching in a Jewish Daycare, and sees herself as a universal Christian; another was raised Presbyterian, became a Quaker, converted to Judaism; another was born Protestant, and another came from a
Catholic mother who was excommunicated, when she married her Protestant father. She went to a friend’s Presbyterian church and like many of us, later rebelled from organized religion as she knew it.

Many of Xavi’s grandparents are formal spiritual teachers, trained in the Sufi meditation tradition and all of the grandparents have been teachers and guides in a variety of venues. Sufism is not a religion. One of the etymological roots of Sufism is Sophia, the wisdom underneath all religions. The Sufi Order that five of us were trained in is an esoteric school that teaches meditation from all of the traditions. It is a universal approach out of which a Universal Worship Service evolved that honors all religions and spiritual paths at the same alter. Candles are lit to honor: The traditions of the Great Mother, (the many Goddess traditions), Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Native American, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the last candle to “all those whether known or unknown to
the world, who have held aloft the light of truth amidst the
darkness of human ignorance.” For me, I see that our little Xavi
may represent for her many grandparents the light of truth.
Like many souls coming in at this time, she reflects us back to
ourselves. Authentic spiritual teachers, empty of their limited
selves, mirror back to the disciple who they really are, in their
essential soul selves. Similarly, as we train Transpersonal Drama
Therapists and work with clients, we learn and practice how to
get beyond our limited sense of our selves and mirror the
essential core self back to our students and clients, beyond
trauma and early negative conditioning.

In the times I have spent with Xavi, engaged in her play
with her as well as on Skype, I have often felt that her loving,
radiant spirit has brought me back to that part of my soul self
that is innocent, light-filled, angelic and playful. What a gift.

Many of Xavi’s grandparents have hurt and been hurt by
others of us. When divorces have been a part of your
experience, there is always pain, unresolved issues and at least an underlying tension.

Having seen each grandparent with Xavi at one time or another in the last two years, I have noticed that every time a grandparent was engaged with her, my heart quickened. I have never seen anything but warm, wonderful connections with each grandparent. Other than feeling sometimes that I cannot get enough of this light filled being for my self, it has been a delight to watch how joyous and loving each grandparent has been with her, each in their own way. What a treasure this little girl is receiving and in turn offering to us. I can’t help but feeling how our world would change if everyone related to everyone else in these ways.

9/11 was the attack on the twin towers. 12/11 Madoff was arrested. 6/11 is Xavi’s birthday. I am writing this on her 2nd birthday. Singing Happy Birthday to her on Skype symbolizes, for me, the hope for the future. A Sufi teaching
says that music will be the next religion because it is the only thing that goes right to the heart, transcending distinctions and differences that divide us. A child’s smile and her own version of making music does, indeed, go directly to the heart.

On my last visit to see her, it was clear that Xavi had developed many new words. She seemed to understand everything, (well almost). Visiting California (several times in these two years) means coming home to Boston hitting the ground running. This time was particularly overwhelming, trying to play catch-up with work. I often arrange work in California, doing therapy, supervision sessions for my California students, facilitating workshops, speaking at Universities. Since “Madoff With My Money” happened, I was working much harder because I had to let my Office Manager go. I was trying to do even more work than usual to bring in income, while also sorting through and organizing the piles on three desk surfaces. My son called on Skype. Funny how all my desk work joyfully goes out the
window when they call. We had a lovely talk. After a while, I blurt out, “so, where’s your beautiful wife and daughter?” My daughter-in-law yells to Xavi’s dad from the other room. I can hear her. “Just move the laptop so we can see each other.” Five seconds later, there they are, clear as life, languishing in the bathtub together. They are taking a seaweed bath. Strips of green flat seaweed were swimming on their bodies. Wow! I have been told that I need more seaweed in my diet by my nutritionist. Xavi’s mom says that they are having a healthy, relaxing, spa experience. How cool is that?

Could any of us have done this with our mothers, the seawood bath and then for our moms, when they were grandmas, to see us nude in real time? Most of us would say, “not on her life!”

So, I wave on the computer, as I always do. I tell Xavi that it looks like she is having fun. I tell her that I miss her already, which is the truth. (I had just come home from a visit a few
days earlier). Each of her parents say “did you hear what she said to you?” “No,” I answered. “Miss you,” I am told. I responded, “Oh she doesn’t really know what that means. Cute.” Her parents both say in unison: “She certainly does.” And to make the point clear, Xavi says it again on her own. How is it that two words, heart felt, from a not quite two year old can have such an effect on me? Her loving spirit filled me for the entire day.

My heart has become an ocean, Beloved, since thou has poured thy love into it.

H.I.K.

When all is said and done, perhaps the most important teaching of any spiritual path is to heal our hearts and learn how to receive and give love, regardless of anything else in our lives. Grandchildren can be the gift given to us as the vehicle to do this. Even though our world and our lives are in crisis on so many fronts, for me, this little granddaughter has been a
joyous, loving treasure that helps give me faith and hope for
my future and for the possibilities for the next generation.